

MNNMYY ES802GMJC12E
 CC RUOMER
 DE RUSBLT #7252 2754333
 ZNY SSSSS ZZ
 O R 211154Z OCT 79
 FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5845
 INFO RUWJPC/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 754
 RUSSOD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 9355
 RUOMRA/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 474
 RUOTC/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1477
 RUHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1957
 RUSSAE/AMEMBASSY TCFW DELFT 7475
 RUHNA/USMISSION HSAITO 72
 RUOMER AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 537
 RUOKRB/AMEMBASSY BFLGRADE 137
 RUEGEQA/CINCPAC
 RUENAAA/CINCEUR
 BT
 S E C R E T KABUL 7252

E X O I S

CHARGE

CHRN

EXDIS

NOFORM

CINCPAC AND CINCEUR ALSO FOR FOLAT

E.O. 12865: RDS-1 12-1-99 (PLATIN, BRUCE A.) CR-4
 TAGS: PEPR, PINS, MILL, VOPS, AV, BP
 SUBJ: (S) REPORTS OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: KABUL 5772 (NOTAL)

1. (S-ENTIRE IFTT)

2. TO SUPPLEMENT THE EMBASSY'S REPORTING IN INTELLIGENCE CHANNELS ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN, THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS OF FOREIGN DIPLOMATS AT KABUL ARE ADDED.

3. ON SEPTEMBER 30, YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR BOGDAN MALBASIC (PLEASE PROTECT) ASKED THE A/DCM WHETHER RECENT U.S. NEWS REPORTS OF TROOP ACTIVITY IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA INVOLVED AIRBORNE UNITS. MALBASIC, A FORMER ARMY GENERAL, WENT ON TO STATE THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT THE SOVIETS HAD ALREADY PREPOSITIONED SUFFICIENT ARMAMENT AND EQUIPMENT FOR ONE AIRBORNE DIVISION AT BAGRAM AIR BASE, NORTH OF KABUL. HE SEEMED TO BE CERTAIN OF THIS INFORMATION.

4. THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR THOUGHT THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD INTRODUCE COMBAT FORCES HERE ONLY AS A LAST RESORT. HE OBSERVED THAT OTHER OPTIONS SHORT OF SUCH A DRASTIC STEP WERE STILL OPEN: E.G., BROADENING THE POLITICAL BASE AND POPULAR APPEAL OF THE KHALQI REGIME -- AND A QUICK MILITARY COUP WHICH WOULD REPLACE THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP WITH PRIZE, INITIALLY APOITICAL PERSONALITIES.

5. ALSO ON SEPTEMBER 30, J. DATLAT SINGH, THE INDIAN DCM (PLEASE PROTECT), TOLD THE A/DCM THAT ONE OF HIS SOURCES HAD RECENTLY DISCUSSED THE PRESENCE OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS WITH A FORMER AFGHAN ARMY OFFICER, NOW A PRISONER AT PUL-I-CHARKI, WHO HAD, BEFORE HIS ARREST, SERVED AT THE HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE HEADQUARTERS OF THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP. THE AFGHAN OFFICER REPORTEDLY SAID THAT WHEN HE LAST WAS IN A POSITION TO HAVE ACCESS TO SENSITIVE INFORMATION, THERE WERE 9,000 SOVIET TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN. THE INDIAN DCM DID NOT KNOW THE EXACT DATE OF HIS INFORMATION, BUT WAS OF THE OPINION THAT IT WAS FAIRLY RECENT. SINGH HIMSELF THINKS THE CURRENT FIGURE IS BETWEEN 12,000 AND 20,000 (HE LEANS TOWARD THE UPPER END OF THAT RANGE) -- AND SAID THAT HE HAD ALREADY REPORTED THIS SPREAD TO NEW DELHI.

6. ON SEPTEMBER 30, A WEST GERMAN EMBASSY OFFICER TOLD THE A/DCM THAT GERMAN TRUCK DRIVERS USING THE REBEL/ARMY-DESERTER/BANDIT-INFESTED HERAT-TO-KANDAHAR ROAD RECENTLY REPORTED SEEING WHAT WERE CLEARLY ETHNIC RUSSIAN SOLDIERS MAN THE LEAD ARMORED VEHICLE IN THEIR ROAD CONVOY. HE CLAIMED THAT THEY TOOK PHOTOGRAPHS AS PROOF. THE GERMAN OFFICER THOUGHT SOME WESTERN NEWS PUBLICATION WOULD PAY MUCH FOR THOSE PHOTOGRAPHS.

7. COMMENT: THE ABOVE VIEWS ARE BEING REPORTED WITH SOME RESERVATIONS. THE YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR'S OBSERVATION ABOUT PREPOSITIONED ARMAMENTS AND EQUIPMENT AT BAGRAM REFLECTS THE SITUATION NOTED AT OTHER LOCATIONS AROUND AFGHANISTAN (E.G., THE PUL-I-CHARKI TANK BASE) WHERE LARGE NUMBERS OF AIRCRAFT, TANKS, AND OTHER MILITARY ITEMS ARE NOW BEING PARKED -- AN ASSEMBLY OF ARMAMENT WHICH WOULD APPEAR TO BE FAR MORE THAN THE AFGHAN ARMY ITSELF COULD MAN IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION TO CONFIRM THE YUGOSLAV'S REPORT OF PREPOSITIONED EQUIPMENT FOR AN AIRBORNE DIVISION.

8. AS FOR THE OBSERVATION OF SINGH, A SOUND DIPLOMAT WHO IS NEVERTHELESS GIVEN OCCASIONALLY TO UNCITICAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE INFORMATION DRIFTING ABOUT IN THE KABUL RUMOR MILL, IT WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT IF HE HAD INDEED PROVIDED THE 12,000-TO-20,000 FIGURE TO THE DECISION-MAKERS AT NEW DELHI. WE KNOW OF NO OTHER SOURCE HERE CITING A FIGURE THAT HIGH AND

WE DO NOT (REPEAT NOT) BELIEVE IT OURSELVES.

9. ALTHOUGH AMERICAN OFFICERS HAVE OCCASIONALLY SEEN SOVIET SOLDIERS AROUND KABUL, WEARING AFGHAN UNIFORMS (A CUSTOMARY PRACTICE FROM THE ROYAL AND DAOUDIST ERAS), NO US OFFICER HERE HAS YET SPECIFICALLY SPOTTED WHAT COULD BE IDENTIFIED AS A "SOVIET COMBAT UNIT." ACCORDING TO AVAILABLE EVIDENCE, HOWEVER, WELL-HIDDEN SOVIET COMBAT FORCES ARE UNDOUBTEDLY ALREADY INSIDE THE COUNTRY. OUR BEST CURRENT ESTIMATE OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN, INCLUDING THOSE GUARDING BAGRAM AIR BASE, IS PERHAPS 4,828 WITH AN ADDITIONAL 3,222 MILITARY ADVISORS.

10. AS FOR THE GERMAN STORY, IT PROBABLY ILLUSTRATES HOW SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS ASSIGNED TO REGULAR AFGHAN ARMY UNITS CAN BE EMPLOYED IN DIRECT OPERATIONAL ROLES AT TIMES.

AMSTUTZ

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